

THE TRANSPORTATION LINK

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Vol. 12 No. 3

March 2005



**Sean M. Moss, Director
of the Office of Small
and Disadvantaged
Business Utilization
(OSDBU) & Minority
Resource Center (MRC)**

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

This month, our lead article looks at the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) "new attitude" toward the growth and success of Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs). This new attitude has resulted in a unique mentor-protégé program and increased training so that DBEs can graduate to become viable, stand-alone firms. Our article summarizes NCDOT's initiatives to provide DBEs with the means to "move ahead."

We also celebrate Women's History Month. This year, the theme is "Women Changing America" - and, in this issue, we present a series of articles on how women business owners are facing the challenges and overcoming the hurdles to change America for the better. One article describes how OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center can help woman business owners launch and grow their businesses. We also present a list of web resources for woman entrepreneurs; and an interview with Terry Neese, the Co-founder and President of Women Impacting Public Policy.

This month's profile continues the Women's History Month theme by honoring Cheryl W. Snead, the President and CEO of Banneker Industries. As an African-American woman with an engineering background, Ms. Snead has a string of "firsts" on her resume. By launching Banneker, she added a new one: the first African-American woman to own a manufacturing business in Rhode Island. In 2004, Ms. Snead won a Women Business Enterprise Award from DOT.

THE DBE CONNECTION

On the Move in North Carolina

New doors are being opened for DBEs and other small minority- and woman-owned firms in North Carolina. In fact, declares state Secretary of Transportation Lyndo Tippet, "there has never been a better time to do business with the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT)."

Initiatives to Help DBEs Move Ahead

Secretary Tippet stresses "a new attitude" at NCDOT resulting in "many new programs . . . to open doors for minority contractors in particular and small businesses in general." Many of these new programs are a direct outgrowth of *N.C. Moving Ahead!* - a \$700 million transportation and economic stimulus initiative that Governor Michael F. Easley signed into law in 2003. In two years, *N.C. Moving Ahead!* has created more than 30,000 jobs and provided seed money for more than 800 transportation-related projects across the state.

NCDOT has been working overtime to make these (and future) opportunities available to minority, woman, and disadvantaged business enterprises (M/W/DBEs). The center of all this activity is NCDOT's Office of Civil Rights and Business Development (OCR). Last year, OCR saw the appointment of its first female Director, Queen Crittendon. Also, OCR named Shelton A. Russell as its new DBE Business Development Manager to focus more attention on expanding minority businesses opportunities.

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Banneker Industries – "Your Strategic Sourcing Solution"

Banneker Industries, Inc. (Banneker) is a world class provider of supply chain management services. Since its founding in 1991, this African-American, woman-owned firm has been developing a reputation for providing cost-effective solutions for managing and distributing products on behalf of its customers.

Last November, Secretary Norman Y. Mineta presented Cheryl W. Snead, President and CEO of Banneker Industries, with a Women Business Enterprise Award for Banneker's outstanding support of DOT's Research and Special Programs Administration. Later this month, Banneker will receive a joint award from the Department of Defense honoring its Mentor-Protégé relationship with the Raytheon Company.

Banneker Industries specializes in all aspects of third party/forward logistics within supply chain management – from material procurement through the receiving, inspection, warehousing, inventory management, kitting, packaging, and distribution functions. Banneker is uniquely positioned to provide strategic sourcing alternatives to retailers and manufacturers. Headquartered in Lincoln, RI, Banneker has multiple facilities within New England and is preparing to expand regionally throughout the country.

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NCDOT's initiatives over the past year include establishing a Minority Contractor Expansion Council (MCEC) to advise the government on ways to expand opportunities for minority-owned firms. MCEC boasts a diverse membership, which includes leaders from DBEs, prime contractors, universities, community colleges, state government, banking, and finance.

Piloting a New Mentor-Protégé Program

With the new team in place and a new attitude from the Governor on down, NCDOT has gotten to work.

In December 2004, NCDOT launched a unique mentor-protégé program in association with MCEC, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Association of General Contractors (AGC). The immediate objective of this program is to increase the capacity of M/W/DBEs to compete in highway construction projects.

However, rather than follow the traditional model of teaming one M/W/DBE with one prime contractor for a period of time, NCDOT is piloting a program where the focus is on a particular contract – and where the prime can mentor more than one protégé in implementing that contract. A kickoff meeting was held with 11 selected protégés in December to discuss the details of the program.

A key feature of the program is the development of a business plan, which spells out the commitments of both the mentor and the various protégé firms. These commitments include a specification of the expectations and milestones that the mentor has for the project, as well as the protégés' needs for training and manpower. As an incentive for successfully completing individual projects according to the business plan, NCDOT is offering monetary bonuses and reimbursement of the prime's mentoring costs.

Financing the Move Ahead

One part of the new attitude at NCDOT is helping M/W/DBEs find the seed money they need to make their business dreams a reality.

Many small and disadvantaged firms have difficulty in obtaining the short-term working capital necessary to keep a project moving forward between payments of their invoices. OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center are working with NCDOT and the Minority Contractor Expansion Council to create a consortium of bankers and other lending institutions to specifically address the challenges M/W/DBEs face in obtaining working capital.

On February 4, Jose Gutierrez, the Deputy Director of OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center, met with a group of seven North Carolina bankers to brief them on DOT's Short Term Lending Program (STLP) and solicited their level of interest. Within a week, one of those banks had already submitted a STLP application – and more are expected in the future.

Successfully Graduating More DBEs

NCDOT is also moving full speed ahead to expand outreach and training. For example, in October 2004, NCDOT published the first issue of *On the Move*, a quarterly newsletter of up-to-date information to help M/W/DBEs grow and thrive in a competitive business environment.

Shelton Russell, OCR's Business Development Manager, states that his goal is to "graduate more firms out of the DBE program." To have a good program, "we need to have all areas working well; however, many times, the business development side is skipped." To avoid this gap, NCDOT has been spearheading increased training to provide M/W/DBEs with the necessary information and tools to emerge from the program as "viable, standalone firms."

Last year, NCDOT hosted four pre-bid information meetings in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, and Greenville. The purpose of

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Partners in Moving Forward: NCDOT Deputy Secretary Willie Riddick (right) and OCR Director Queen Crittendon meet with Bob Robinson, Director of the Raleigh Business and Technology Center.

What's more, the news about STLP is getting around. By mid-February, NCDOT received inquiries from a number of financial institutions who had not been part of the February 4th meeting. They too wanted to learn how they could join the growing partnership to help M/W/DBEs grow and prosper.

"NCDOT is committed to the successful development of DBE firms," say Queen Crittendon, Director of NCDOT's Office of Civil Rights and Business Development. "While we know the barriers that M/W/DBEs face, we are finding solutions."

DOT's STLP is national in scope and partners with financial institutions across the country. To learn more about this program and find a participating bank near you, check out: http://osdbu.dot.gov/mrc_services/shortTermLendingProgram.cfm

New Ferry Service Linking Elizabeth to New York

On January 10, 2005, the Federal Transit Administration awarded Union County, NJ, a \$9.5 million grant to establish ferry service between Elizabeth and lower Manhattan. The money will fund construction of a new ferry terminal and two new docks located on the eastern edge of the City of Elizabeth known as Elizabethport.

Elizabeth Ferry operations are expected to begin by June 2006, with direct trips to lower Manhattan every 30 minutes during the morning and evening rush hours, then hourly during off-peak times. The ferry is expected to serve 1,000-1,200 commuters a day, and provide regional travelers with a shorter and

more convenient travel option than the congested Lincoln and Holland tunnels. The ferry is part of a series of initiatives by Union County and the City of Elizabeth to improve transportation infrastructure in the area. Other projects include the Elizabeth Segment of the Newark Elizabeth Rail Link light rail system, the Union County Transportation Center, and the North Avenue Corridor Improvement Project.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.unioncountynj.org/news/0501frry.htm> and
<http://www.dot.gov/affairs/fta0105.htm>

On the Move in North Carolina...continued from page 2

these meetings was to discuss specific small business and purchase order contracts expected in the coming months. More than 100 M/W/DBEs attended these meetings.

However, NCDOT didn't stop there. The participants at these pre-bid meetings said they needed further training – and NCDOT was happy to provide it. In September 2004, NCDOT hosted two workshops to enhance the bidding and estimating skills of M/W/DBEs. In November and December, NCDOT organized OSHA Certification Training sessions to promote worker safety on project sites.

The year ended with an intensive week-long management and technical training session called the Bidding and Estimating Entrepreneurial Development Program. Attended by 21 individuals representing 18 M/W/DBEs, the program provided the participants with hands-on training on how to grow their businesses. For example, participants were given the opportunity to participate in various simulations on how to successfully bid on actual highway projects from start to finish.

Continuing to Move Ahead in 2005

In 2004, the foundation was laid and the new attitude put in place. In 2005, more partnerships will be forged and the opportunities for M/W/DBEs will continue to grow. NCDOT Deputy Secretary Willie Riddick states that the “financial outlook for companies doing business with DOT is looking even brighter” and predicts “even stronger relationships among contractors and DOT staff in the new year.”

“The economic benefits of *N.C. Moving Ahead!* continue to multiply,” says Gov. Easley. “Through this program, we are putting millions of additional dollars in the hands of small businesses. And when you help small businesses, you help communities and families.”

More information about NCDOT's program can be found at: <http://www.ncdot.org/business/ocr/>

For the latest issue of NCDOT's *On the Move* newsletter, visit <http://www.ncdot.org/business/ocr/newsletter/>

To contact OCR, call 919-733-2300 or 1-800-522-0453, or submit a question: <http://www.ncdot.org/business/ocr/contact/>

Banneker Industries...continued from page 1

Ms. Snead started the company as a machine shop during Operation Desert Storm, before seeing the potential market of her current line of business. As the first African-American woman to earn a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and the first African-American woman to own a manufacturing business in Rhode Island, Ms. Snead thought it was appropriate to name the company after Benjamin Banneker, the 18th century black mathematician, astronomer, and inventor. Ms. Snead said that in naming the company after this historical figure, she wanted to share the innovative legacy of the man and the lesson that people of diverse backgrounds and cultures can make significant contributions to this country and specifically to their communities.

Today, Banneker has 35 full time employees (referred to as “Team Banneker”) and generates over \$4 million in revenue. In speaking about the factors that led to Banneker's success, Roland H. Snead, Executive Vice President said, “Banneker's greatest resources are our Team members and the technology that sets us apart from our competition.” He then added, “It's the customer service that impresses most companies. They are finding a place that can give them a quick turnaround and great accountability.”

In an interview that appeared in the March 1999 issue of *Black Enterprise* Magazine, Ms. Snead offered readers several pieces of advice on how to succeed. In addition to attending trade shows and networking through business organizations, Ms. Snead said: “You must also develop relationships with your customers . . . Once you've done that, you must find out what their needs are, areas where they need assistance, their issues with past suppliers and where they see their company going.”

Recently Ms. Snead expanded on that advice by saying “The key to success today is providing your customer with a TOTAL solution, so they only need one partner (you) to strategically fulfill their needs. In some cases you may have to collaborate with like businesses to fill the gaps that may not be your core competency but will add value to your customer.”

For more information visit <http://www.banneker.com>

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Celebrating Women's History Month

This month, OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center join the Nation as it recognizes Women's History Month and the many contributions of women throughout history. The annual celebration was begun by a group of women in Sonoma County, California, who set aside a week to commemorate women's history in 1978. In 1981, Congress passed a resolution making this a national celebration, which was expanded to the entire month of March in 1987.

This year's celebrations are focused on the theme of "Women Change America." Part of that impact involves how women are changing the business world. *The Transportation Link* presents three articles looking at the current challenges facing woman-owned businesses. The main article looks at woman-owned businesses in the federal contracting arena – and discusses the resources available at OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center to help our customers succeed. The article is supplemented by a list of web resources available to help woman entrepreneurs and a wide-ranging interview with Terry Neese, a successful entrepreneur and President of Women Impacting Public Policy.

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Woman-Owned Businesses – Overcoming the Challenges

Over the last 50 years, federal laws and policy actions have positively impacted the growth and success of women-owned firms. Specifically, the creation of new resources for woman business owners (such as Women's Business Centers and women's advocate positions) within the federal Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization have helped woman-owned businesses (WOBs) to become one of the fastest growing sectors of businesses.

Despite their impressive strides, WOBs continue to face substantial institutional barriers to success and remain historically under-utilized in federal procurements. Federal policy initiatives such as the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) federal procurement goaling program often fall short of their overall objectives. WOBs also continue to struggle with policy issues such as access to affordable health care insurance, access to capital, and fair and equitable tax treatment.

Seeking to improve utilization of WOBs in DOT contracts, OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center is constantly looking for new ways to overcome common barriers to contracting and to improve opportunities for WOBs. Through outreach events such as conferences and one-on-one marketing sessions, OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center seek to bridge the gap between WOBs and government procurement officials. Also, through its DBE program, the office offers WOBs increased access to capital.

On February 24, 2005, DOT joined the SBA and other federal agencies in the first of a series of roundtable meetings exploring strategies to increase the participation of WOBs in the federal, state, local, and prime contracting arenas. An initial focus of the group will be on implementing a business matchmaking process specifically tailored to WOBs. Also, the Federal Highway Administration recently completed a successful pilot to provide road construction and management training to Native American women in California and South Dakota.

Pat Hodge, OSDBU and the Minority Resource Center Women's Business Advocate, works closely with the DOT's various Operating Administrations (OA) every day to raise the visibility of WOBs in day-to-day procurement activities. She also monitors DOT's OAs to insure that they are working to achieve their WOB contracting goals.

RECENT SUCCESS STORIES

New Transit Work for a WOB

On March 18, 2004, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) awarded an indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract to Interactive Elements, Inc. (IEI) in a joint venture with Delon Hampton Associates. IEI is a woman-owned, 8(a), small, disadvantaged business specializing in mass transit operations and safety. The award is to provide project management oversight to assist FTA in monitoring and ensuring the development and implementation of various projects.

High Praise for a WOB Highway Project

In October 2004, Bruch & Bruch successfully completed a \$2.1 million highway project located near the Olympic National Forest in northwestern Washington. Bruch & Bruch is a woman-owned, HUBZone, small business. After completion of the project, FHWA received a letter from Grays Harbor County stating: "The newly constructed road section is comfortable to drive and I see it to be a good example of future expectation as planned improvements are completed. Well done!"

For more information about DOT's Women's Business Services, check out
http://osdbu.dot.gov/osdbu_services/Women_Services.cfm
 or contact Pat Hodge, 800-532-1169/pat.hodge@ost.dot.gov.

For more information on scheduled events and activities for Women's History Month, visit the National Women's History Project at:
<http://www.nwhp.org/whm/themes/themes.html>.

A Conversation with Terry Neese, Successful Entrepreneur and Policy Advocate

Terry Neese is Co-Founder and President of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), a national bi-partisan public policy organization representing more than 505,000 women in business and women business owners nationwide. Ms. Neese's management of WIPP is just the latest stage of a career where she has assumed leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. Ms. Neese founded the highly successful Terry Neese Personnel Services, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary this year. Fortune Magazine has named Ms. Neese one of the most influential small businesspersons in Washington and both the Business Women's Network and the National Foundation for Women Legislators have recognized Ms. Neese as "Entrepreneur of the Year."

Q: *What are the major issues facing women business owners today?*

Our members have consistently told us that access to affordable healthcare, a level playing field for women-owned business (WOBs) in the federal contracting arena and making sure the tax structure is fair to small businesses are their top issues. In addition, access to capital continues to pose a problem to women business owners. We are in the field now with our annual survey, which will outline the policy priorities of our members for 2005. We expect to be releasing the findings within two weeks.

Are there a unique set of issues affecting women business owners in the government contracting arena?

Women business owners face the same barriers that most small businesses face in the government contracting arena – the ability to compete for contracts and the technical expertise that is required to be successful. But they face an additional challenge, which is that they are often pioneers in the industry they represent. That puts them at a disadvantage not only in the federal sector but in their own commercial sector.

What factors are contributing to the growth and success of WOBs today? What are some of the major roadblocks?

WOBs are increasing at twice the rate of their male counterparts and in fact the number of majority-owned, privately-held, women-owned business grew by 23% between 1997 and 2004 as compared to 9% growth of all businesses during the same period. There are now 15.6 million WOBs – accounting for 48% of all businesses in the country. Women are finding that the path to greater financial success is in the business world, and that there are fewer barriers to growth when they own their own businesses as opposed to climbing the corporate ladder. Being able to manage in their own unique style, set their own schedules, and develop their own goals and strategies are all factors contributing to WOB growth.

Major roadblocks, while still there, are diminishing, as the numbers of firms increase, and their contributions to the national economy are recognized. Some of the concerns still existing are access to capital, access to markets (both federal and corporate), training, and technology. We also believe if you run a business and you are not involved in politics, then politics will run your business. This is a new frontier of training for women – the world of politics.

Both SBA and DOT have established procurement goals of 5% being awarded to WOBs. How effective are these goals? Are there other mechanisms that should be utilized?

Many agencies have not met that goal. And given that WOBs comprise a much larger portion of small businesses in this country than 5%, it should certainly be higher. But agencies like DOT are really trying to meet the goals. We find that there is a much higher sense of responsibility on the part of the agency leadership to meet the WOB goals than 3 or 4 years ago. Not all that long ago, agencies told us they couldn't find women businesses – well they are not saying that now – the women businesses are aggressively marketing to the federal agencies and WIPP is helping them do just that.

The largest hurdle for WOBs is an education on how the process works (what paperwork must be completed, information on contracts that will be awarded, how to do market research, finding the right sales team, etc.). The second largest hurdle is getting introductions to program managers and contracting officers who are in the position to consider awarding them a contract. The OSDDBU offices can help on both counts by implementing programs that help educate and facilitate introductions to folks in their agencies.

The U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce recently sued SBA alleging that it failed to implement a special federal contracting program to reach its 5% WOB goal. Do you think this is an effective strategy to increase federal contracting with WOBs? Are there other strategies that could be followed?

Suing the government is counterproductive to the goal of getting the 5% mandate for WOB implemented. Now, everyone we talk to on Capitol Hill and the agencies have the perfect excuse not to touch this issue. "It's in the courts" is an easy excuse and one that can take decades to resolve. Look at the Adarand case – that took so long to wind its way through the courts, the courts kept track of it by Roman Numerals. [Editor's Note: Adarand was an affirmative action case that was litigated over 12 years - yielding at least 9 federal court decisions, including 3 by the U.S. Supreme Court.]

A far better strategy is for all WOBs interested in contracting to talk to their legislators about meeting the WOB goal. Pressure from Capitol Hill to meet the goals directly impacts the agencies and their interest in awarding contracts to WOBs. WIPP talks about increasing government contracts all day every day on Capitol Hill and with the agencies. Our mission is to advocate on issues such as this on behalf of all women in

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A Conversation with Terry Neese...continued from page 5

business. Our strategy, together with our 29 women business associations, is to be a clear, united voice about the importance of meeting, and exceeding, these goals. If we could get all of the women business owners in the country (15.6 million) to start raising their voices on this issue, we think the 5% goal would be met without much of a problem.

What should be done to improve the utilization of WOBs in government contracts?

WIPP continues to pressure agencies and Capitol Hill to meet the women-owned goal of 5% of all federal prime contracts. Of course, we believe that if a 5% mandate, which was passed in

2000, was implemented for women businesses, it would have a major impact on awards to WOBs. In addition, we believe there should be additional “teeth” in the procurement goals. Including the goals in annual performance reviews would be helpful! In addition, the National Women’s Business Council (NWBC) held an “Access to Government Markets” roundtable discussion on September 13, 2004 in Washington, DC. Items discussed were: Best Practices, Challenges, and Recommendations. This information is available on the NWBC website [www.nwbc.org].

Which tools and resources currently used by government agencies are successful in assisting WOBs to win new contracts and generally grow their businesses? Are there additional tools and resources that you think would be effective, but are not being used (or not being used enough)?

The NWBC, of which I am a member, is in the process of preparing a report on all of the practices in the federal agencies that target outreach to WOBs. The report will come out in the spring and I think we will have a much better picture of what activities agencies are undertaking to increase their contracting and outreach to WOBs.

WIPP believes that the agencies must make a concerted effort to simplify the process – and reach out and educate women business owners on winning strategies. Technology tools can and should be used in outreach. For example, much more nationwide teleconferencing should be undertaken by the OSDBUs. Our women business owners are not interested in spending their time and money running to every small business conference so a more effective model is to reach them through technology. A recent study found that women business owners use technology in greater numbers than male-owned businesses.

Women business owners also respond to one-on-one counseling, which is done by many OSDBUs and we encourage agencies to continue that practice. However, in the end, the agencies must be cognizant of their goals to outreach effectively to WOBs, and to employ the strategies necessary for the WOBs to compete on a level playing field. If the end goal of meeting the contracting goal is not part of the agency strategy, and it is not measured, it will simply not be met. And in meeting the goals, perhaps, including the goals in annual performance reviews would be helpful.

What advice could you offer to women who have just started (or are thinking of starting) a business – particularly in the federal contracting arena?

For those budding entrepreneurs, there are many services provided by the SBA to help them get started. Women business owners are more likely than male business owners to seek out advice and assistance, and we urge them to take advantage of such assistance through programs like the Women’s Business Centers around the country. Nothing replaces good preparation (a good business plan, adequate funding, etc.) and counselors at the Women Business Centers, the Services Corps of Retired Executives, and other agencies will step them through the process. There are also many programs available to help entrepreneurs compete, such as WIPP’s procurement training program, “Winning Strategies”.

CELEBRATING WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH

Woman Entrepreneurs’ Web Resources

Federal Government Sites

Contract Assistance for Women Business Owners:
<http://www.sba.gov/GC/indexprograms-cawbo.html>

Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau:
<http://www.dol.gov/wb/welcome.html>

National Women’s Business Council: <http://www.nwbc.gov>

SBA Office of Women Business Ownership:
<http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness/>

SBA Online Women’s Business Center:
<http://www.onlinewbc.gov/>

Commercial and Nonprofit Sites

Alliance of Business Women International:
<http://www.abwi.org>

Business and Professional Women/USA:
<http://www.bpwusa.org/>

Business Women’s Network: <http://www.bwni.com/>

Center for Women’s Business Research:
<http://www.womensbusinessresearch.org/>

Government Contracting Information for Women-Owned Businesses: <http://www.womanowned.com/growth/newmarkets/introgovernment.htm>

National Association of Women Business Owners:
<http://www.nawbo.org>

National Education Center for Women in Business:
<http://www.e-magnify.com/>

National Women Business Owners Corporation:
<http://www.nwboc.org/>

Women Impacting Public Policy: www.wipp.org

Women’s Business Enterprise National Council:
<http://www.wbenc.org>

Women President’s Organization:
<http://www.womenpresidentsorg.com/>

Women’s Transportation Seminar:
<http://www.wtsnational.org/>

National Association of Railway Business Women’s:
<http://www.narbw.org/essence.html>

Strategies to Remove Contract Barriers

The 1st National DBE Conference in November 2004 consisted of three plenary sessions, four workshops, and a number of other presentations. In this feature of The Transportation Link we summarize some of the many tips and insights that were presented at the Conference so that you will be "Ready, Willing & Able" to succeed in 2005.

The first plenary session at the 2004 National DBE Conference consisted of panelists from state transportation agencies, a large prime contracting firm, and a successful minority-owned firm. The panelists shared their successful strategies and unique approaches to overcoming common contracting barriers such as bonding, bundling, "bait & switch" problems, and the breakdown of contract negotiations. The overall message that audience members took away from this session was that all of the parties involved (e.g., government agencies, prime contractors, and DBEs) must do their part and work together to overcome these barriers to contracting.

Strategies for Grant Recipients and State Officials

Panelists: Robin N. Black, Chief of Staff at the Illinois Department of Transportation; Arthur E. Wright of the Equal Opportunity Office at the Florida Department of Transportation; and Gloria Dixon, Vice President Equal Employment Opportunity DBE Officer

The panelists shared some innovative approaches to removing contract barriers, including:

- Hosting networking sessions and other events to introduce DBEs to prime contractors;
- Establishing a good working relationship with your agency's procurement office and developing a mutual strategy for achieving DBE contracting goals;
- Working with DBEs to find financing and access to capital;
- Highlighting and publicizing DBE success stories to encourage their utilization; and
- Educating prime contractors on the benefits of using DBEs and providing information on how to locate them.

Strategies for Prime Contractors

Panelists: Cedric Curtis, Vice President and National Practice Leader of Aviations Facilities at Cater and Burgess, Inc.

Mr. Curtis shared his insight and strategy as a prime contractor to overcoming common barriers to contracting with DBEs. Characterizing the relationship between prime contractors and DBEs as a dance, Mr. Curtis stated, "...to be effective, you must listen to the same tune and be in rhythm with each other." A few of his strategies from prime contractors included:

- Being proactive in identifying, engaging, and working with DBEs;
- Developing tools such as a DBE partner database to quickly locate DBEs with desired skill sets;
- Visiting DBEs on site and evaluating their operations to determine whether your styles are compatible;
- Communicating effectively with DBE and prime contracting partners and clearly stating expectations; and
- Acting like a leader and building unity among the team.

Strategies for DBEs

Panelists: Dr. Delon Hampton, President of Delon Hampton & Associates

Dr. Hampton shared his insights as a successful minority business leader on what DBEs should do to overcome common barriers to successful contracting. Some of the ideas he shared with the audience included:

- Being prepared for whatever the task or job may be;
- Developing a well thought out plan and having the necessary skills, training, and resources necessary to carry it out;
- Insuring that you have ample cash flow to operate and cover project expenses for at least a year;
- Maintaining strong accounting records; and
- Taking measures to limit your liability.

PROCUREMENT WATCH

Houston Light Rail Project Moves Forward

On January 31, 2005, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provided a \$1.96 million grant to the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), which serves Houston, Texas. The grant will be used so METRO can continue its environmental impact studies on light rail service.

METRO opened its first light rail transit service with a fleet of 15 cars on January 1, 2004. The \$300 million line was constructed entirely with local funds. On November 4, 2003, voters approved a referendum to add 72 miles of extensions and new segments to METRORail.

"When voters approved the referendum," said FTA Jennifer L. Dorn, "they made a commitment to public transportation solutions and METRO made a commitment to voters to make good on their plans. With this grant, the Houston metropolitan area can look forward to continuing progress on the expansion of bus services and the extension of METRORail."

More information can be found at: <http://www.dot.gov/affairs/fta0205.htm> and <http://www.ridemetro.org/>

15th Annual OSDBU Procurement Conference

The 15th Annual OSDBU Procurement Conference will be held April 21, 2005 at the Show Place Arena in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. This is a national conference to foster business partnerships between the federal government, its prime contractors, and small, minority, veteran-owned, HUBZone, and woman-owned businesses.

The conference, which is sponsored by the federal Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, brings small businesses, large corporations, and government agencies together in one place to network and share ideas. This year, in addition to the Exhibit floor, there will be four educational seminars exploring the many aspects of the changing procurement process, and a series of one-on-one counseling sessions with program managers and procurement representatives.

For more information, visit
<http://www.fbcinc.com/osdbu/>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS February/March 2005

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|-------------|--|
| March 3-4 | 20th Annual FRMBC Business Expo – Ft. Lauderdale, FL
www.frmbc.org
<i>Contact:</i> Florida Regional Minority Business Council • 305-260-9901 • frmbc@frmbc.org |
| March 29-31 | 38th Annual Chicago Business Opportunity Fair – Chicago, IL
www.cmbdc.org
<i>Contact:</i> Chicago Minority Business Development Council, Inc. • 312-263-0105 • cjordan@cmbdc.org |
| April 9 | Opportunities in Franchising for Minorities and Women Seminar – Washington, D.C.
<i>Contact:</i> Minority Business Entrepreneur Magazine • 888-872-2677 • www.franchiseexpo.com |
| April 20-23 | Black Business Professionals Conference – Savannah, GA
www.blackbusinessprofessionals.com
<i>Contact:</i> Black Business Professionals • 912-354-7400
jewel@blackbusinessprofessionals.com |
| April 21 | 15th Annual OSDBU Procurement Conference – Upper Marlboro, MD
www.fbcinc.com/osdbu/default.asp
<i>Contact:</i> Federal Business Council • Bob Jeffers • 800-878-2940 or 301-206-2940 ext. 226 • bj1@fbcdcb.com |

Keep up-to-date on our calendar of events by visiting us at <http://osdbu.dot.gov>.
Our website provides a new electronic calendar that allows users to search events by month across the country.

<http://osdbu.dot.gov>

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